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WORDSWORTH

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A DESCRIPTION OF THE WORDSWORTH  
AND COLERIDGE MANUSCRIPTS IN THE  
POSSESSION OF MR. T. NORTON LONGMAN.

Edited, with Notes, by W. HALE WHITE.

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# AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHARGE OF APOSTASY AGAINST WORDS- WORTH

BY

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Manuscripts in the possession of Mr T. Norton Longman'

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## ADVERTISEMENT

THE main object which I have had in view is to arrange a few passages from Wordsworth's prose and poetical works in such a way as to let him defend himself. No apology therefore is necessary for the length of the quotations.

I have to thank Professor Knight for permission to make extracts from his "Life of William Wordsworth," and I am also indebted to Mr. Ernest Hartley Coleridge for similar permission to copy parts of letters published in his "Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge."

To Mr. T. Hutchinson, Editor of the "Oxford Wordsworth," and of the reprint of the "Poems in Two Volumes" of 1807, I am under special obligation for many valuable suggestions.



## AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHARGE OF APOSTASY AGAINST WORDSWORTH

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THERE is a widely-spread opinion that Wordsworth towards the middle of his life underwent a great change, and that he apostatised from his earlier faith both in politics and religion. I shall attempt to show that there is no real foundation for this charge against him. We will, in the first place, consider the political accusation—that, although in his younger days he was republican, or even revolutionary, he afterwards became a common-place Tory.

In 1791-2 Wordsworth was in France. Much of the “Descriptive Sketches” was actually composed during the visit, and the poem was published in 1793. The extract given below is printed as it appeared in 1793, when Wordsworth was twenty-three years old, and, following it, is a reprint of the same verses as they appeared in their final form in 1836, when he was sixty-six.

1793

1—“Tho’ Liberty shall soon, indignant, raise  
Red on his hills his beacon’s comet blaze ;  
Bid from on high his lonely cannon sound,  
And on ten thousand hearths his shout rebound ;

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 616.

His larum-bell from village-tow'r to tow'r  
 Swing on th' astounded ear it's dull undying roar :  
 Yet, yet rejoice, tho' Pride's perverted ire  
 Rouze Hell's own aid, and wrap thy hills in fire.  
 Lo ! from th' innocuous flames, a lovely birth !  
 With its own Virtues springs another earth :  
 Nature, as in her prime, her virgin reign  
 Begins, and Love and Truth compose her train ;  
 With pulseless hand, and fix'd unwearied gaze,  
 Unbreathing Justice her still beam surveys :  
 No more, along thy vales and viny groves,  
 Whole hamlets disappearing as he moves,  
 With cheeks o'erspread by smiles of baleful glow,  
 On his pale horse shall fell Consumption go.

“Oh give, great God, to Freedom's waves to ride  
 Sublime o'er Conquest, Avarice, and Pride,  
 To break, the vales where Death with Famine scow'rs,  
 And dark Oppression builds her thick-ribb'd tow'rs ;  
 Where Machination her fell soul resigns,  
 Fled panting to the centre of her mines ;  
 Where Persecution decks with ghastly smiles  
 Her bed, his mountains mad Ambition piles ;  
 Where Discord stalks dilating, every hour,  
 And crouching fearful at the feet of Pow'r,  
 Like Lightnings eager for th' almighty word,  
 Look up for sign of havoc, Fire and Sword  
 —Give them, beneath their breast while Gladness springs,  
 To brood the nations o'er with Nile-like wings ;  
 And grant that every sceptred child of clay,  
 Who cries, presumptuous, 'here their tides shall stay,'  
 Swept in their anger from th' affrighted shore,  
 With all his creatures sink—to rise no more.”

1849-50

<sup>1</sup>—“But foes are gathering—Liberty must raise  
 Red on the hills her beacon's far-seen blaze ;

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 22.

Must bid the tocsin ring from tower to tower !—  
 Nearer and nearer comes the trying hour !  
 Rejoice, brave Land, though pride's perverted ire  
 Rouse hell's own aid, and wrap thy fields in fire :  
 Lo, from the flames a great and glorious birth ;  
 As if a new-made heaven were hailing a new earth !  
 —All cannot be : the promise is too fair  
 For creatures doomed to breathe terrestrial air :  
 Yet not for this will sober reason frown  
 Upon that promise, nor the hope disown ;  
 She knows that only from high aims ensue  
 Rich guerdons, and to them alone are due.

“Great God ! by whom the strifes of men are weighed  
 In an impartial balance, give thine aid  
 To the just cause ; and, oh ! do thou preside  
 Over the mighty stream now spreading wide :  
 So shall its waters, from the heavens supplied  
 In copious showers, from earth by wholesome springs,  
 Brood o'er the long-parched lands with Nile-like wings !  
 And grant that every sceptred child of clay  
 Who cries presumptuous, ‘ Here the flood shall stay,’  
 May in its progress see thy guiding hand,  
 And cease the acknowledged purpose to withstand ;  
 Or, swept in anger from the insulted shore,  
 Sink with his servile bands, to rise no more !”

I shall refer to this second version again. Meanwhile, we must admit, as a fair inference, that Wordsworth's opinions in 1793 could not have been totally condemned by him in 1836. The two lines

“May in its progress see thy guiding hand,  
 And cease the acknowledged purpose to withstand”

were added in 1836.

In 1793 Dr. Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, published his “Sermon preached before the Stewards of the West-

minster Dispensary," and the young Wordsworth was moved to write to him upon the appendix thereto, which contained some "strictures" on the French Revolution. Whether the letter was sent we know not. Considering the age of the writer, it is a remarkable essay. The style is already essentially that of the "Convention of Cintra." It is closely packed, and the sentences move towards their conclusion with the march of a battalion. The measures taken in France to reduce the incomes of the superior clergy are applauded, not on any anti-theological grounds, but because "a part of this prodigious mass of riches is gone to preserve from famine some thousands of curés who were pining in villages unobserved by Courts." Wordsworth also declares himself a republican and in favour of universal suffrage. "If there is a single man in Great Britain who has no suffrage in the election of a representative, the will of the society of which he is a member is not generally expressed; he is a Helot in that society." His republicanism, however, is mainly a statement of general principles, and he does not recommend immediate action. It is one thing to accept a proposition and it is another to have such confidence in it that we are compelled to go out in the street and make it real. Wordsworth was a thinker, and he may have been conscious of the doubt which infects all abstractions, the suspicion that there are limitations and equally valid counter-abstractions. In a letter which the Bishop of Lincoln, in the "Memoirs," unfortunately does not date, but which must have been written somewhere about 1793, Wordsworth says to his friend William Mathews: <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, vol. i. pp. 79, 80.

"I disapprove of monarchical and aristocratical governments, however modified. Hereditary distinctions, and privileged orders of every species, I think, must necessarily counteract the progress of human improvement. Hence it follows, that I am not among the admirers of the British constitution. I conceive that a more excellent system of civil policy might be established among us; yet in my ardour to attain the goal, I do not forget the nature of the ground where the race is to be run. The destruction of those institutions which I condemn, appears to me to be hastening on too rapidly. *I recoil from the very idea of a revolution.* [The Bishop does not say whether the italics are his own.] I am a determined enemy to every species of violence. I see no connection, but what the obstinacy of pride and ignorance renders necessary, between justice and the sword,—between reason and bonds. I deplore the miserable condition of the French, and think that *we* can only be guarded from the same scourge by the undaunted efforts of good men. . . . I severely condemn all inflammatory addresses to the passions of men. I know that the multitude walk in darkness. I would put into each man's hand a lantern, to guide him; and not have him to set out upon his journey depending for illumination on abortive flashes of lightning, or the coruscations of transitory meteors."

The ninth and tenth books of the "Prelude" were written in 1804. Wordsworth therein gives another description of what he felt at the outbreak of the Revolution. When war was declared against France he prayed for the success of his country's enemies.

1. . . . "I rejoiced,  
Yea, afterwards—truth most painful to record!—  
Exulted, in the triumph of my soul,  
When Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown,

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 722.

Left without glory on the field, or driven,  
 Brave hearts ! to shameful flight. It was a grief,—  
 Grief call it not, 'twas anything but that,—  
 A conflict of sensations without name,  
 Of which *he* only, who may love the sight  
 Of a village steeple, as I do, can judge,  
 When, in the congregation bending all  
 To their great Father, prayers were offered up,  
 Or praises for our country's victories ;  
 And, 'mid the simple worshippers, perchance  
 I only, like an uninvited guest  
 Whom no one owned, sate silent, shall I add,  
 Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come."

Oh ! much have they to account for, who could tear,  
 By violence, at one decisive rent,  
 From the best youth in England their dear pride,  
 Their joy, in England : "

He apologises for the crimes of the Revolution :

<sup>1</sup> " Meanwhile the Invaders fared as they deserved :  
 The Herculean Commonwealth had put forth her arms,  
 And throttled with an infant godhead's might  
 The snakes about her cradle ; that was well,  
 And as it should be ;

. . . . .

<sup>2</sup> . . . . .

When a taunt  
 Was taken up by scoffers in their pride,  
 Saying, ' Behold the harvest that we reap  
 From popular government and equality,'  
 I clearly saw that neither these nor aught  
 Of wild belief engrafted on their names  
 By false philosophy had caused the woe,  
 But a terrific reservoir of guilt  
 And ignorance filled up from age to age,

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 724.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 725.

That could no longer hold its loathsome charge,  
But burst and spread in deluge through the land."

It is evident that these lines portray to us not merely what Wordsworth was in 1791-2, but also what he was in 1804.

Let us now go back two or three years before 1804. In 1799 Buonaparte was made First Consul. After the peace of Amiens in 1802 Wordsworth and Dorothy went to France. Here is a sonnet written at Calais in August 1802 :

<sup>1</sup> " Jones ! as from Calais southward you and I  
Went pacing side by side, this public Way  
Streamed with the pomp of a too-credulous day.  
When faith was pledged to new-born Liberty :  
A homeless sound of joy was in the sky :  
From hour to hour the antiquated Earth  
Beat like the heart of Man : songs, garlands, mirth,  
Banners, and happy faces, far and nigh !  
And now, sole register that these things were,  
Two solitary greetings have I heard,  
' *Good morrow, Citizen !* ' a hollow word,  
As if a dead man spake it ! Yet despair  
Touches me not, though pensive as a bird  
Whose vernal coverts winter hath laid bare."

In this same August also was written the sonnet to Toussaint l'Ouverture ending—

<sup>2</sup> . . . . " Thou hast left behind  
Powers that will work for thee ; air, earth, and skies ;  
There's not a breathing of the common wind  
That will forget thee ; thou hast great allies ;  
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,  
And love, and man's unconquerable mind."

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 305.

The sonnet "October 1803" is as follows :

<sup>1</sup> "When, looking on the present face of things,  
I see one man, of men the meanest too !  
Raised up to sway the world, to do, undo,  
With mighty Nations for his underlings,  
The great events with which old story rings  
Seem vain and hollow : I find nothing great :  
Nothing is left which I can venerate ;  
So that a doubt almost within me springs  
Of Providence, such emptiness at length  
Seems at the heart of all things. But, great God !  
I measure back the steps which I have trod ;  
And tremble, seeing whence proceeds the strength  
Of such poor Instruments, with thoughts sublime  
I tremble at the sorrow of the time."

These sonnets, let us bear in mind, were composed *before* the book of the "Prelude" just quoted, *before* that noble expression of sympathy with the Herculean Commonwealth which

"Throttled with an infant godhead's might  
The snakes about her cradle ;"

The "Thanksgiving Ode" of 1816 of course will be put forward as proof of a recantation which is almost blasphemous. That there are unhappy passages in that ode cannot be denied. The worst originally stood—

"But Thy most dreaded instrument,  
In working out a pure intent,  
Is Man—arrayed for mutual slaughter,  
—Yea, Carnage is thy daughter !"

and thus it remained till 1845, when Wordsworth altered it to "But Man is Thy most awful instrument  
In working out a pure intent" :  
leaving out the last two lines.

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 309.

The version of 1816 is objectionable, but all that Wordsworth says is that war is a means whereby divine purposes are accomplished. If a republican had said it about the destruction of an army employed to crush republican liberty few persons would have objected, and to Wordsworth Buonaparte was the incarnation of despotism.

The justification of his anti-Buonapartism in the sonnets and "Ode" is exactly that which is pleaded in the "Convention of Cintra," published in 1809.<sup>1</sup>

"This just and necessary war, as we have been accustomed to hear it styled from the beginning of the contest in the year 1793, had, some time before the Treaty of Amiens, viz. after the subjugation of Switzerland, and not till then, begun to be regarded by the body of the people, as indeed both just and necessary; and this justice and necessity were by none more clearly perceived, or more feelingly bewailed, than by those who had most eagerly opposed the war in its commencement, and who continued most bitterly to regret that this nation had ever borne a part in it. Their conduct was herein consistent: they proved that they kept their eyes steadily fixed upon principles; for, though there was a shifting or transfer of hostility in their minds as far as regarded persons, they only combated the same enemy opposed to them under a different shape; and that enemy was the spirit of selfish tyranny and lawless ambition."

In the same pamphlet the war against the French people at the beginning of the Revolution is denounced together with the war against America as a war against liberty.

<sup>2</sup> "In the course of the last thirty years we have seen two wars waged against Liberty—the American war, and the war against the French people in the earlier

<sup>1</sup> *Prose Works*, vol. i. p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 135.

stages of their Revolution. In the latter instance the emigrants and the continental Powers and the British did, in all their expectations and in every movement of their efforts, manifest a common ignorance—originating in the same source. And, for what more especially belongs to ourselves at this time, we may affirm that the same presumptuous irreverence of the principles of justice, and blank insensibility to the affections of human nature, which determined the conduct of our government in those two wars *against* liberty, have continued to accompany its exertions in the present struggle *for* liberty, and have rendered them fruitless.”

Wordsworth never cared to defend himself publicly against his calumniators—being happily possessed of a very serene indifference to accusations, excepting those urged by himself or occasionally by Dorothy, his wife, Coleridge, or Lamb—but in 1821, in a letter to Loch, he says<sup>1</sup>—

“I should think that I had lived to little purpose if my notions on the subject of government had undergone no modification. My youth must, in that case, have been without enthusiasm, and my manhood endued with small capability of profiting by reflection. If I were addressing those who have dealt so liberally with the words renegade, apostate, &c., I should retort the charge upon them, and say, *you* have been deluded by *places* and *persons*, while I have stuck to *principles*. I abandoned France and her rulers, when *they* abandoned the struggle for liberty, gave themselves up to tyranny, and endeavoured to enslave the world. I disapproved of the war against France at its commencement, thinking—which was perhaps an error—that it might have been avoided; but after Buonaparte had violated the independence of Switzerland, my heart turned against him, and against the nation that could submit to be the instrument

<sup>1</sup> Knight, *Life of William Wordsworth*, 1889, vol. iii. pp. 58, 59.

of such an outrage. Here it was that I parted, in feeling, from the Whigs, and to a certain degree united with their adversaries, who were free from the delusion (such I must ever regard it) of Mr. Fox and his party, that a safe and honourable peace was practicable with the French nation, and that an ambitious conqueror like Buonaparte could be softened down into a commercial rival."

I think we must now admit that, so far as the French Revolution was concerned, Wordsworth did not turn traitor. We may be so amazed at Buonaparte's military skill as to forget that it was used for a person and not for a noble cause, or we may thank God for him because he overturned the thrones of Europe; but we cannot honestly accuse Wordsworth of being an enemy to freedom because he rejoiced over Waterloo.

With regard to Wordsworth's general politics explanation is not so simple, because until he wrote the two "Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmoreland" in 1818 he had seldom, except indirectly, expressed himself on any questions of purely domestic policy; but there is no doubt that, when he was twenty-three years old (as we have seen from his letter to the Bishop of Llandaff), he was a republican and in favour of Parliamentary Reform. It will clear the ground a little to note that whatever his opinions afterwards on this or that form of government may have been, his sympathies to the end of his days were altogether with common and poor people. Never was there a poet who lived and loved a simpler life. His joys and sorrows took their rise in nothing adventitious, but in that which is the property of all. Byron was externally anti-aristocratic, but he was really an aristocrat in every fibre. It is true, nevertheless, that

Wordsworth supported the Tories in the main during the war and also after 1815; that he upheld a property qualification, and that he was not a believer in Catholic Emancipation. As to Catholic Emancipation, he held that it would be no remedy for the "wretched" state of Ireland. The chief proximate causes of Irish misery he considered to be the Papacy and the tenure and management of landed property, and he thought that, evenly balanced as English parties were, the introduction into Parliament of a new power independent of each of those parties, the power of dense ignorance, but disciplined by a priesthood, would be most perilous. These, and not theological reasons, are the main argument in his 'Letter to the Bishop of London' on the Catholic Relief Bill. His adhesion to the Government, his belief in a property qualification, and his hostility to the Reform Act, were due to his dread of reaction. His addresses to the freeholders of Westmoreland are inspired by the horror of Napoleonic tyranny. He feared lest in England, as in France, democracy should end in despotism. To Sir Henry Taylor he says: <sup>1</sup> "What may be suffered by the existing generation no man can foresee, but the loss of liberty for a time will be the inevitable consequence. Despotism will be established, and the whole battle will be to be [*sic*] fought over by subsequent generations." In the letter to Loch of 1821 just quoted he thus explains his development since 1793:

<sup>2</sup> "A free discussion of public measures through the press I deem the *only* safeguard of liberty: without it I have neither confidence in kings, parliaments, judges, or divines. They have all in their turn betrayed their

<sup>1</sup> Knight, *Life*, vol. iii. p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 59, 60.

country. But the press, so potent for good, is scarcely less so for evil ; and unfortunately they who are misled and abused by its means are the persons whom it can least benefit. It is the fatal characteristic of their disease to reject all remedies coming from the quarter that has caused or aggravated the malady. I am *therefore* for vigorous restrictions ; but there is scarcely any abuse that I would not endure, rather than sacrifice, or even endanger, this freedom.

“When I was young—giving myself credit for qualities which I did not possess, and measuring mankind by that standard—I thought it derogatory to human nature to set up property in preference to person, as a title for legislative power. That notion has vanished. I now perceive many advantages in our present complex system of representation, which formerly eluded my observation. This has tempered my ardour for reform : but if any plan could be contrived for throwing the representation fairly into the hands of the property of the country, and not leaving it so much in the hands of the large proprietors as it now is, it should have my best support ; though even in that event there would be a sacrifice of personal rights, independent of property, that are now frequently exercised for the benefit of the community.”

Rightly or wrongly, he had come to the conclusion that in an uncontrolled democracy, to which he foresaw the Reform Act must lead, power would be wielded by unreflecting masses and the units would not act individually. The House of Commons would cease to be a deliberative assembly and become an assembly of delegates.

<sup>1</sup> “Then will follow frequent Parliaments—triennial perhaps at first—which will convert the representatives into mere slavish delegates, as they now are in America,

<sup>1</sup> Knight, *Life*, vol. iii. p. 128.

under the dictation of ignorant and selfish numbers, misled by unprincipled journalists, who, as in France, will, no few of them, find their way into the House of Commons, and so the last traces of a deliberative assembly will vanish. But enough of this melancholy topic. I resided fifteen months in France, during the heat of the Revolution, and have some personal experience of the course which these movements must take, if not fearlessly resisted, before the transfer of legislative power takes place."

The best security, Wordsworth thought, that man, imperfect as he is, would use his reason in voting for a member of Parliament was the ownership of something of value; the possession of land he believed to be on the whole a better guarantee of honesty than the possession of wealth in any other form. His argument on this point is interesting :

<sup>1</sup> "Knowing that there could be no *absolute* guarantee for integrity, and that there was no *certain* test of discretion and knowledge, for bodies of men, the prudence of former times turned to the best substitute human nature would admit of, and civil society furnished. This was property; which showed that a man had something that might be impaired or lost by mismanagement; something which tended to place him above dependence from need; and promised, though it did not insure, some degree of education to produce requisite intelligence. To be a Voter required a fixed Property, or a defined privilege; to be voted for, required more; and the scale of demand rose with the responsibility incurred. A Knight of the Shire must have double the estate required from a Representative of a Borough. This is the old law; and the course of things since has caused, as was

<sup>1</sup> *Address to the Freeholders of Westmoreland.* Prose Works, vol. i. pp. 240, 241.

observed above, that high office to devolve almost exclusively on Persons of large Estate, or their near connections. And why is it desirable that we should not deviate from this track? If we wish for honesty, we shall select men who, not being subject to one of the strongest temptations to be otherwise than honest, will incur heavier disgrace, and meet with less indulgence, if they disappoint us. Do we wish for sage conduct, our choice will fall upon those who have the wisdom that lurks in circumstances, to supply what may be deficient in their personal accomplishments. But, if there *be* a deficiency, the fault must lie with the electors themselves. When persons of large property are confided in, we cannot plead want of opportunities for being acquainted with them. Men of large estates cannot but be men of wide concerns; and thus it is that they become known in proportion. Extensive landed property entails upon the possessor many duties, and places him in divers relations, by which he undergoes a public trial. Is a man just in his dealings? Does he keep his promises? Does he pay his debts punctually? Has he a feeling for the poor? Is his family well governed? Is he a considerate landlord? Does he attend to his own affairs; and are those of others, which have fallen under his care, diligently and judiciously managed? Answers to these questions, where the subject of them has but an inconsiderable landed Property, can only be expected from a very narrow circle of neighbours;—but place him at the head of a large estate, and knowledge of what he is in these particulars must spread to a distance; and it will be further known how he has acted as a Magistrate, and in what manner he has fulfilled the duties of every important office which he may have been called to by virtue of his possessions.”

Perhaps the deepest root of Wordsworth's indifference to popular “aspirations” was the conviction that individuals must be changed before the condition of the people

as a whole can be improved. He said to Mr. Dewey in 1833,<sup>1</sup> "that although he was known to the world only as a poet, he had given twelve hours' thought to the condition and prospects of society, for one to poetry." He affirmed that "the world is running mad with the notion that all its evils are to be relieved by political changes, political remedies, political nostrums—whereas the great evils, sin, bondage, misery lie deep in the heart, and nothing but virtue and religion can remove them."

We cannot, however, justly affirm that Wordsworth at any time was a Tory, unless the word be used to describe a creed very peculiar in its limitations and one which certainly was not held by the Tory party. He told Crabb Robinson :<sup>2</sup> "I have no respect whatever for Whigs, but I have a great deal of the Chartist in me." In 1835, being then sixty-five years old, he published as an appendix to his *Poems* some remarks on legislation for the poor. He wished, he said, to talk upon this subject in "plain prose." The New Poor Law Act, it will be remembered, had been passed in 1834. Wordsworth's object in the main is to show that every man who is willing to work and cannot find work has a claim on the State for support. <sup>3</sup> "The point to which I wish to draw the reader's attention is, that *all* persons who cannot find employment, or procure wages sufficient to support the body in health and strength, are entitled to a maintenance by law." This is <sup>4</sup> "a principle which cannot be violated without infringing upon one of the most precious rights of the English people, and opposing one of the most sacred claims of civilized humanity." What are the

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of the Rev. Orville Dewey, D.D.*, ed. 1844, p. 622.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary*, vol. iii. p. 315 (second edition).

<sup>3</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 959.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

reasons which compel Wordsworth to insist on this right? They are not derived from expediency, but from first principles. The community is not bound to relieve the poor because relief is good policy, but because the right to property does not rest upon any sounder foundation than the right to live.

<sup>1</sup> "If self-preservation be the first law of our nature, would not everyone in a state of nature be morally justified in taking to himself that which is indispensable to such preservation, where, by so doing, he would not rob another of that which might be equally indispensable to *his* preservation? And if the value of life be regarded in a right point of view, may it not be questioned whether this right of preserving life, at any expense short of endangering the life of another, does not survive man's entering into the social state; whether this right can be surrendered or forfeited, except when it opposes the divine law, upon any supposition of a social compact, or of any convention for the protection of mere rights of property?"

Again :

<sup>2</sup> "Is it not indisputable that the claim of the state to the allegiance, involves the protection, of the subject? And, as all rights in one party impose a correlative duty upon another, it follows that the right of the state to require the services of its members, even to the jeoparding of their lives in the common defence, establishes a right in the people (not to be gainsaid by utilitarians and economists) to public support when, from any cause, they may be unable to support themselves.

"Let us now consider the salutary and benign operation of this principle. Here we must have recourse to elementary feelings of human nature, and to truths which from their very obviousness are apt to be slighted, till they are forced upon our notice by our own sufferings

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 959.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 959, 960.

or those of others. In the 'Paradise Lost,' Milton represents Adam, after the Fall, as exclaiming, in the anguish of his soul—

“ ‘Did I request Thee, Maker, from my clay  
To mould me man ; did I solicit Thee  
From darkness to promote me ?  
. . . . . My will  
Concurred not to my being.’ ”

“Under how many various pressures of misery have men been driven thus, in a strain touching upon impiety, to expostulate with the Creator ! and under few so afflictive as when the source and origin of earthly existence have been brought back to the mind by its impending close in the pangs of destitution. But as long as, in our legislation, due weight shall be given to this principle, no man will be forced to bewail the gift of life in hopeless want of the necessities of life.”

Wordsworth is opposed to casting the relief of the poor altogether upon the benevolent. <sup>1</sup> “How discouraging,” he fears, “would be the sense of injustice, which could not fail to arise in the minds of the well-disposed, if the burden of supporting the poor, a burden of which the selfish have hitherto by compulsion borne a share, should now, or hereafter, be thrown exclusively upon the benevolent.” To increase the power of self-maintenance, he proposes to repeal such laws as prevent the formation of joint stock companies.

<sup>2</sup> “There are, no doubt, many and great obstacles to the formation and salutary working of these societies, inherent in the mind of those whom they would obviously benefit. But the combinations of masters to keep down, unjustly, the price of labour would be fairly checked by

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 962.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

them, as far as they were practicable; they would encourage economy, inasmuch as they would enable a man to draw profit from his savings, by investing them in buildings or machinery for processes of manufacture with which he was habitually connected. His little capital would then be working for him while he was at rest or asleep; he would more clearly perceive the necessity of capital for carrying on great works; he would better learn to respect the larger portions of it in the hands of others; he would be less tempted to join in unjust combinations."

If Wordsworth had been in the House of Commons he would have been considered dangerous, for it is a recurrence to first principles which has produced every great revolution, whether in religion, morals, politics, or art. They may be ridiculed, but are always feared as the most insurrectionary of realities. It would not have excused him in the eyes of a Tory whip that he voted for a Lowther against a Brougham if he could quote that tremendous passage from Milton just cited, and assert that the State could not lawfully ask for obedience from those whom it would not feed when they were starving. The whip would have known that no dependence could be placed upon such a man, either on a second reading, or in Committee.

The charge of theological apostasy is one which it is more difficult to meet because it is wider and vaguer. It is alleged that when Wordsworth reached middle life, or even before, he no longer looked upon the world with the same eyes, that he had quieted his scepticism, and that as a necessary consequence his poetry thenceforward became uninteresting. Coleridge himself does not hesitate to accuse him of backsliding. In a letter dated 8th August 1820 he says :

<sup>1</sup> "I will not conceal from *you* [underlined in original] that this inferred dependency of the human soul on accidents of birthplace and abode, together with the vague, misty, rather than mystic, confusion of God with the world, and the accompanying nature-worship, of which the asserted dependence forms a part, is the trait in Wordsworth's poetic works that I most dislike as unhealthful, and denounce as contagious; while the odd introduction of the popular, almost the vulgar, religion in his later publications (the popping in, as Hartley says, of the old man with a beard), suggests the painful suspicion of worldly prudence—at best a justification of masking truth (which, in fact, is a falsehood substituted for a truth withheld) on plea of expediency—carried into religion. At least it conjures up to my fancy a sort of *Janus* head of Spinoza and Dr. Watts, or 'I and my brother the dean.'"

This letter, with its astonishing imputation of worldly prudence, is unworthy of Coleridge. It was written to Allsop; and Coleridge—the underlining of the "you" should be noticed—has adapted himself closely to Allsop's peculiarities by objecting in the same breath to Wordsworth's "nature-worship" and his "popular religion." It might be thought that it would have been difficult even for Coleridge to disagree with both. He ventures in the same letter on another criticism upon Wordsworth which is curiously wide of the mark, and altogether unlike the criticism of earlier days before the rupture between the two friends had taken place. Speaking of the lines in "The Brothers"—

"The thought of death sits easy on the man  
Who has been born and dies among the mountains,"

<sup>1</sup> *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge*, vol. i. p. 107, edit. 1836.

he says, "I fear that this, like some other few of Wordsworth's *many* striking passages, means less than it seems, or rather promises, to mean," and then he charges Wordsworth with attributing to a shepherd the effect produced upon himself—"the geese of Phœbus are all swans, and Wordsworth's shepherds and estates men are Wordsworth's, even (as in old Michael) in the unpoetic traits of character." Wordsworth might have excused himself, had he cared to do so, by reminding Coleridge that these lines are put into the mouth of the Priest; that the investiture of the common with that which is created by the poet had been defended by Coleridge himself; and that, in the 'Biographia Literaria,' he had declared that

<sup>1</sup> "the characters of the vicar and the shepherd mariner in the poem of 'The Brothers,' those of the Shepherd of Green-head Gill in the 'Michael,' have all the verisimilitude and representative quality, that the purposes of poetry can require. They are persons of a known and abiding class, and their manners and sentiments *the natural product of circumstances common to the class.*"

Coleridge was not ignorant that constant healthy intercourse with great natural objects tends to disperse the fear of death, and he must have remembered Wordsworth's own note on this passage in "The Brothers":

<sup>2</sup> "There is not anything more worthy of remark in the manners of the inhabitants of these mountains, than the tranquillity, I might say indifference, with which they think and talk upon the subject of death. Some of the country churchyards, as here described, do not contain a single tombstone, and most of them have a very small number."

<sup>1</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, vol. ii. p. 49, edit. 1847.

<sup>2</sup> *Lyrical Ballads*, vol. ii. p. 226, edit. 1800.

He proposed to Allsop—it is difficult to believe he would have proposed it to anybody but Allsop—to substitute for Wordsworth's lines the two following :

“The thought of death sits easy on the man,  
Whose earnest *will* [italics in original] hath lived  
among the deathless.”

One other remark may be offered on Coleridge's indictment. Whatever Wordsworth's theology may have been in later years, he did not spend half his life in attempting to find a philosophy in it. He could not have written five treatises on the Logos and the Logos alogos. Grant all that is said about his submission to orthodoxy, it was nothing but acceptance, and if it is to be condemned, much more to be condemned is Coleridge's attempt to interpret the Bible and the catechism by Kant and Schelling, and put upon the plain statements of the church creeds meanings which they were never intended to bear. It was this determination to justify theology by the intellect which made Coleridge such a sad object to Carlyle. Carlyle saw in that <sup>1</sup> “hocus-pocus of ‘reason’ versus ‘understanding’ ” something “terribly perilous,” the mother in due time of “spectral Puseyisms, monstrous illusory hybrids, and ecclesiastical chimeras.” With the simply pious, such as Johnson or Wordsworth, Carlyle sympathised. Wordsworth he thought to be a man <sup>2</sup> “*multa tacere loquive paratus*.” “Never, or never but once, had he seen a stronger intellect, a more luminous and veracious power of insight.”

I do not deny that at one time in his life Wordsworth had to struggle with disbelief and despair. The evidence of the “Prelude” is express on this point.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Sterling*, pp. 78, 80, edit. 1851.

<sup>2</sup> *Reminiscences*, pp. 301, 304, vol. ii. Norton's edit. 1887.

<sup>1</sup> . . . . "So I fared,  
 Dragging all precepts, judgments, maxims, creeds,  
 Like culprits to the bar ; calling the mind,  
 Suspiciously, to establish in plain day  
 Her titles and her honours ; now believing,  
 Now disbelieving ; endlessly perplexed  
 With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground  
 Of obligation, what the rule and whence  
 The sanction ; till, demanding formal *proof*,  
 And seeking it in everything, I lost  
 All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,  
 Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,  
 Yielded up moral questions in despair.

"This was the crisis of that strong disease,  
 This the soul's last and lowest ebb ; I drooped,  
 Deeming our blessed reason of least use  
 Where wanted most : 'The lordly attributes  
 Of will and choice,' I bitterly exclaimed,  
 'What are they but a mockery of a Being  
 Who hath in no concerns of his a test  
 Of good and evil ; knows not what to fear  
 Or hope for, what to covet or to shun ;  
 And who, if those could be discerned, would yet  
 Be little profited, would see, and ask  
 Where is the obligation to enforce ?  
 And, to acknowledged law rebellious, still,  
 As selfish passion urged, would act amiss ;  
 The dupe of folly, or the slave of crime."

The declaration of war against France in 1793 and his consequent hatred of the established political creed drove him to a general reconstruction of creeds by Reason alone. He was—

<sup>2</sup> . . . . "Pleased with extremes, nor least  
 With that which makes our Reason's naked self  
 The object of its fervour."

<sup>1</sup> *Prelude*, xi. ll. 293-320.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xi. ll. 233-235.

and could—

<sup>1</sup> . . . . "As, by simple waving of a wand,  
The wizard instantaneously dissolves  
Palace or grove, . . . . unsoul  
As readily by syllogistic words  
Those mysteries of being which have made,  
And shall continue evermore to make,  
Of the whole human race one brotherhood."

In order to find something of which he was sure, he turned to abstract science—

<sup>2</sup> . . . . "And there sought  
Work for the reasoning faculty enthroned  
Where the disturbances of space and time—  
Whether in matters various, properties  
Inherent, or from human will and power  
Derived—find no admission."

But it is to Dorothy that he ascribes his gradual restoration.

<sup>3</sup> . . . . "Then it was—  
Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good !—  
That the belovèd sister in whose sight  
Those days were passed, now speaking in a voice  
Of sudden admonition—like a brook  
That did but *cross* a lonely road, and now  
Is seen, heard, felt, and caught at every turn,  
Companion never lost through many a league—  
Maintained for me a saving intercourse  
With my true self."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Prelude*, xii. ll. 81-87.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xi. 328-333.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ll. 333-342.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. T. Hutchinson observes in a note to me: "It is clearly implied in the *Prelude*, Book xi., that for some time (say 1793 to 1795) Wordsworth was a fervid disciple of Godwin. He had previously been a disciple of Beaupuy, and both these men were enthusiastic votaries of the goddess Reason. On perceiving the consequences of Godwin's system, Wordsworth seems to have lapsed for a time into the apathy of despair. Soon, however, under Dorothy's influence he saw that man's

After this "crisis" there is no evidence that Wordsworth passed through another. Excepting the record in the "Prelude," we know little or nothing about his thoughts on the highest subjects before 1799, the year when the "Prelude" was begun. Coleridge, indeed, in 1796 determined Wordsworth's position in a phrase which is superficially decisive, but, alas! is but a phrase.<sup>1</sup> In May of that year he tells Thelwall that "a very dear friend"—who was Wordsworth—"is, at least, a *semi-atheist*." It is difficult to say what the word *theos* meant to Coleridge in 1796, and if we knew what it meant, it would be still more difficult to know what a *semi*-denial of that *theos* could mean. We do know that 1795 Coleridge wrote "The Eolian Harp"—faultlessly beautiful throughout the first forty-three lines—in which towards the close he conjectures that all animated nature may

"Be but organic harps diversely framed,  
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps  
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,  
At once the Soul of each, and God of all."

It is true that he turns round to Sara and applauds her because she had

. . . . "holily dispraised  
These shapings of the unregenerate mind ;  
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break  
On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring ;"

but this apparent recantation is nothing more than an early example of Coleridge's habit of temporarily conceding everything to the person who for the moment had any power over him.

happiness lay not in scouring the soul clear of all feelings, prejudices, maxims, principles, &c. (which is what Godwin taught), but in the proper cultivation of his feelings and other faculties of mind, instinct, imagination, &c."

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, vol. i. p. 164.

The "Prelude" was begun, as I have just said, in 1799, and it was finished in 1805. From 1799, at least, Wordsworth is *radically* fixed.

<sup>1</sup> . . . "How strange that all  
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,  
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused  
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,  
And that a needful part, in making up  
The calm existence that is mine when I  
Am worthy of myself!"

He may know depression, doubt, melancholy almost hypochondriacal; he will not be blind to the pathos of human life; he will admit that the Powers above seem to take small account of a love even like that of Michael, but he does not mutiny. He possesses a rule by which for fifty years he can live. This rule, however, is one peculiar to himself, and is not coincident with that of any church or sect. It is as true of his religion as it is of his politics, that the line of his convictions cuts across recognised lines, and that at one moment we find him within the authorised limit and at another far beyond it.

Let us see what are the outlines of his faith as expressed in the "Prelude." He has learned to seek and find pure delight in common things.

<sup>2</sup> "Daily the common range of visible things  
Grew dear to me: already I began  
To love the sun;" . . .

and he has discovered that by constant intercourse with nature, doubts, if they be not answered, disappear. This is one of the truths of which Wordsworth was appointed to be the messenger—that we are to be cured

<sup>1</sup> *Prelude*, i. ll. 344-350.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. ll. 176-178.

not so much by argument as by health, sunlight, and beauty.

<sup>1</sup> " If this be error, and another faith  
Find easier access to the pious mind,  
Yet were I grossly destitute of all  
Those human sentiments that make this earth  
So dear, if I should fail with grateful voice  
To speak of you, ye mountains, and ye lakes  
And sounding cataracts, ye mists and winds  
That dwell among the hills where I was born.  
If in my youth I have been pure in heart,  
If, mingling with the world, I am content  
With my own modest pleasures, and have lived  
With God and Nature communing, removed  
From little enmities and low desires,  
The gift is yours ; if in these times of fear  
This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown,  
If, 'mid indifference and apathy,  
And wicked exultation when good men  
On every side fall off, we know not how,  
To selfishness, disguised in gentle names  
Of peace and quiet and domestic love,  
Yet mingled not unwillingly with sneers  
On visionary minds ; if, in this time  
Of dereliction and dismay, I yet  
Despair not of our nature, but retain  
A more than Roman confidence, a faith  
That fails not, in all sorrow my support,  
The blessing of my life ; the gift is yours,  
Ye winds and sounding cataracts ! 'tis yours,  
Ye mountains ! thine, O Nature ! Thou hast fed  
My lofty speculations ; and in thee,  
For this uneasy heart of ours, I find  
A never-failing principle of joy  
And purest passion."

<sup>1</sup> *Prelude*, ii. ll. 419-451.

Behind all failure, defeat, death, lie recovery, victory, and life.

- <sup>1</sup> "Should the whole frame of earth by inward throes  
Be wrenched, or fire come down from far to scorch  
Her pleasant habitations, and dry up  
Old Ocean, in his bed left singed and bare,  
Yet would the living Presence still subsist  
Victorious, and composure would ensue,  
And kindlings like the morning—presage sure  
Of day returning and of life revived."

God exists, that is to say,

- <sup>2</sup> . . . . . "the one  
Supreme Existence, the surpassing life  
Which—to the boundaries of space and time,  
Of melancholy space and doleful time,  
Superior, and incapable of change,  
Nor touched by welterings of passion—is,  
And hath the name of, God."

This is what Wordsworth was thinking when he was at Cambridge, but it is evident that it is also what he thought in 1804, when the lines were written. The highest love he knows is

- <sup>3</sup> "Love that adores, but on the knees of prayer,  
By heaven inspired ; that frees from chains the soul,  
Lifted, in union with the purest, best,  
Of earth-born passions, on the wings of praise  
Bearing a tribute to the Almighty's Throne."

And his faith is

- <sup>4</sup> "Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought  
Of human Being, eternity, and God."

<sup>1</sup> *Prelude*, v. ll. 30-37.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* vi. ll. 133-139.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* xiv. ll. 183-187.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* xiv. ll. 204, 205.

It may be said that these quotations show what a gulf there is between the "Prelude" and the "Ecclesiastical Sketches." With these we will deal presently. We may say, however, in passing that we do not know that what is supposed to be added in the "Sketches" was not believed by Wordsworth in 1799. Speaking of books, from Homer to poor men's ballads, he says, at any rate before 1804, they are

1 . . . . "only less,  
For what we are and what we may become,  
Than Nature's self, which is the breath of God,  
Or His pure Word *by miracle revealed.*"

He loves the English Church and is indignant that its services should be desecrated as they were at Cambridge.

2 "Be Folly and False-seeming free to affect  
Whatever formal gait of discipline  
Shall raise them highest in their own esteem—  
Let them parade among the Schools at will,  
But spare the House of God. Was ever known  
The witless shepherd who persists to drive  
A flock that thirsts not to a pool disliked?  
A weight must surely hang on days begun  
And ended with such mockery. Be wise,  
Ye Presidents and Deans, and, till the spirit  
Of ancient times revive, and youth be trained  
At home in pious service, to your bells  
Give seasonable rest, for 'tis a sound  
Hollow as ever vexed the tranquil air;  
And your officious doings bring disgrace  
On the plain steeples of our English Church,  
Whose worship, 'mid remotest village trees,  
Suffers for this."

Granting, nevertheless, for argument's sake, that the beliefs expressed in the "Sketches" were a late accretion,

<sup>1</sup> *Prelude*, v. ll. 219-222.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 401-418.

not a fragment of his earlier belief, as will presently appear—and this is the important point—was displaced by them. Moreover—to repeat what in substance has been urged before—that which belongs exclusively to the Church is simply indicated : that which does not belong solely to the Church is cherished, expanded, and presented again and again in continually varying forms.

Let us now turn to the “Excursion,” which was composed during the years 1795-1813. If we assume that the Wanderer and the Pastor speak as Wordsworth would have spoken, we must also assume that much which is spoken by the Solitary is also Wordsworth. It has a penetrating quality which is a sign that it is an experience. At the very beginning the religion of the Wanderer is given in outline.

<sup>1</sup> “The Scottish Church, both on himself and those  
 With whom from childhood he grew up, had held  
 The strong hand of her purity ; and still  
 Had watched him with an unrelenting eye.  
 This he remembered in his riper age  
 With gratitude, and reverential thoughts.  
 But by the native vigour of his mind,  
 By his habitual wanderings out of doors,  
 By loneliness, and goodness, and kind works,  
 Whate’er, in docile childhood or in youth,  
 He had imbibed of fear or darker thought  
 Was melted all away ; so true was this,  
 That sometimes his religion seemed to me  
 Self-taught, as of a dreamer in the woods ;  
 Who to the model of his own pure heart  
 Shaped his belief, as grace divine inspired,  
 And human reason dictated with awe.”

This passage was revised by Wordsworth in 1827, when he substituted “shaped” for “framed” in the last line

<sup>1</sup> *Excursion*, i. ll. 397-413.

but one, and again in 1836, when he changed "or" in the last line into "and" as we now have it. It was certainly, therefore, not overlooked, and it may be taken as a warning by any sect inclined to adopt Wordsworth that it will find him a dangerous ally.

The Wanderer consoles the Solitary with the hope of the immortality of those he had lost, but though "immovably convinced" he admits we want

1. . . . . "the virtue to exist by faith  
As soldiers live by courage; as, by strength  
Of heart, the sailor fights with roaring seas."

His faith is something which needs resolution, as all faith needs it. It is not a voluntary closure of the eyes, nor is it a passive acceptance of historical testimony. Therefore the Wanderer goes on to tell the Solitary that faith is lost, not because evidence is found to be untrustworthy, but in the main by custom, time, and sense. What faith brings to the mind is the tidings of its

2 "Mysterious union with its native sea  
. . . . .  
. . . . . of invisible things;  
Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power;  
And central peace, subsisting at the heart  
Of endless agitation."

The whole drift, however, of the fourth book of the "Excursion" is more remarkable than any detached part, and not less remarkable are its omissions. The "Argument" of the last part of the third book is "His [the Wanderer's] languor and depression of mind, from want of faith in the great truths of Religion and want of con-

<sup>1</sup> *Excursion*, iv. ll. 202-203.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 1140, ll. 1144-1147.

fidence in the virtue of mankind," and that of the fourth book as it is more fully given in the edition of 1814 is:

"State of feeling produced by the foregoing Narrative—A belief in a superintending Providence the only adequate support under affliction—Wanderer's ejaculation to the supreme Being—Account of his own devotional feelings in youth involved in it—Implores that he may retain in age the power to find repose among enduring and eternal things—What these latter are—Acknowledges the difficulty of a lively faith—Hence immoderate sorrow, but doubt or despondence not therefore to be inferred And proceeds to administer consolation to the Solitary—Exhortations—How these are received—Wanderer resumes—And applies his discourse to that other cause of dejection in the Solitary's mind—The disappointment of his expectations from the French Revolution—States the rational grounds of hope—And insists on the necessity of patience and fortitude with respect to the course of the great revolutions of the world—Knowledge the source of tranquillity—Rural life and Solitude particularly favourable to a knowledge of the inferior creatures—Study of their habits and ways recommended for its influence on the affections and the imagination—Exhortation to bodily exertion and an active communion with Nature—Morbid solitude a pitiable thing—If the elevated imagination cannot be exerted, try the humbler fancy—Superstition better than apathy—Apathy and destitution unknown in the infancy of society—The various modes of Religion prevented it—This illustrated in the Jewish, Persian, Babylonian, Chaldean, and Grecian modes of belief—Solitary interposes—Wanderer, in answer, points out the influence of religious and imaginative feeling on the mind in the humble ranks of society, in rural life especially—This illustrated from present and past times—Observation that these principles tend to recall exploded superstitions and popery—Wanderer rebuts this charge, and contrasts the dignities

of the Imagination with the presumptive littleness of certain modern Philosophers, whom the Solitary appears to esteem—Recommends to him other lights and guides—Asserts the power of the Soul to regenerate herself—Solitary agitated, and asks how—Reply—Personal appeal—Happy for us that the imagination and affections in our own despite mitigate the evils of that state of intellectual Slavery which the calculating understanding is so apt to produce—Exhortation to activity of Body renewed—How Nature is to be communed with—Wanderer concludes with a prospect of a legitimate union of the imagination, the affections, the understanding, and the reason—Effect of the Wanderer's discourse—Evening—Return to the cottage."

To understand the importance which Wordsworth assigns to the Imagination, we must remember what he had suffered from destructive analysis. It was the root of all evil to him, and he insists, therefore, on the authority of the Imagination, which is nearly, if not quite, the same as faith. He believes that there are presentations, perceptions which if we like we can reduce to nothings, but are nevertheless realities—in fact, the essential realities of life. He goes very little further than this: for him it is enough, and he leaves to each man to obtain for himself what increase of definiteness he needs. He thought that superstition was nearer the truth than "the formal inference where feeling hath no place"; that any religion was better than the mere "repetitions wearisome of sense," and that when the Greek mother offered up her hair to the river Cephissus in thankfulness for her child's return a message was delivered to her through the rite more precious to her than any which "uninspired research" could bring and of greater validity.

- <sup>1</sup> “ And, doubtless, sometimes, when the hair was shed  
 Upon the flowing stream, a thought arose  
 Of Life continuous, Being unimpaired ;  
 That hath been, is, and where it was and is  
 There shall endure,—existence unexposed  
 To the blind walk of mortal accident ;  
 From diminution safe and weakening age ;  
 While man grows old, and dwindles, and decays ;  
 And countless generations of mankind  
 Depart ; and leave no vestige where they trod.”

In 1815, just after the “ Excursion ” was published, Wordsworth composed a sonnet in which the teaching of the fourth book is summed up.

- <sup>2</sup> “ Weak is the will of Man, his judgment blind ;  
 Remembrance persecutes, and Hope betrays ;  
 Heavy is woe ;—and joy, for human-kind,  
 A mournful thing, so transient is the blaze !’  
 Thus might *he* paint our lot of mortal days  
 Who wants the glorious faculty assigned  
 To elevate the more-than-reasoning Mind,  
 And colour life’s dark cloud with orient rays.  
 Imagination is that sacred power,  
 Imagination lofty and refined :  
 ’Tis hers to pluck the amaranthine flower  
 Of Faith, and round the sufferer’s temples bind  
 Wreaths that endure affliction’s heaviest shower,  
 And do not shrink from sorrow’s keenest wind.”

He here affirms exactly what has been said above, that Imagination is not mere picturing or dreaming, but is constructive of *reality*.

In the fifth book, where the Priest comes on the scene, none of the usual theological difficulties are pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Excursion*, iv. ll. 753-762.

<sup>2</sup> *Miscellaneous Sonnets*, Part i. No. xxxv.

pounded, nor is the solution of those that are presented to us usual or orthodox. The Wanderer says that the subjects on which he and his friend have discoursed are :

1 "Is Man  
A child of hope ? Do generations press  
On generations, without progress made ?  
Halts the individual, ere his hairs be grey,  
Perforce ? Are we a creature in whom good  
Preponderates, or evil ? Doth the will  
Acknowledge reason's law ? A living power  
Is virtue, or no better than a name,  
Fleeting as health or beauty, and unsound ?  
So that the only substance which remains,  
(For thus the tenour of complaint hath run)  
Among so many shadows, are the pains  
And penalties of miserable life,  
Doomed to decay, and then expire in dust ! "

The Priest has no direct answer to give except that

2 " . . . for the general purposes of faith  
In Providence, for solace and support,  
We may not doubt that who can best subject  
The will to reason's law, can strictliest live  
And act in that obedience, he shall gain  
The clearest apprehension of those truths,  
Which unassisted reason's utmost power  
Is too infirm to reach."

And then begin the stories of his parishioners. The catholicity of these tales, which is their most singular quality, is expressed essentially in the description of the churchyard.

3 "To a mysteriously-united pair  
This place is consecrate ; to Death and Life,

<sup>1</sup> *Excursion*, v. ll. 465-478.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ll. 515-522.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ll. 903-921.

And to the best affections that proceed  
 From their conjunction ; consecrate to faith  
 In him who bled for man upon the cross ;  
 Hallowed to revelation ; and no less  
 To reason's mandates ; and the hopes divine  
 Of pure imagination ;—above all,  
 To charity, and love, that have provided,  
 Within these precincts, a capacious bed  
 And receptacle, open to the good  
 And evil, to the just and the unjust ;  
 In which they find an equal resting-place :  
 Even as the multitude of kindred brooks  
 And streams, whose murmur fills this hollow vale,  
 Whether their course be turbulent or smooth,  
 Their waters clear or sullied, all are lost  
 Within the bosom of yon crystal Lake,  
 And end their journey in the same repose !”

The Priest declares his “faith in him who bled for man,” but, again, it is simply named. There Wordsworth stops reverentially. There is no reference here or elsewhere to a contract between the First and Second Person in the Trinity, nor any theory as to the mode in which the crucifixion is effective for man's salvation ; but of one thing the poet is sure, that death to all is repose. The last lines of the book affirm that without the co-operation and consent of the soul the Word is ineffectual.

<sup>1</sup> . . . “The pure soul, the soul sublime and pure ;  
 With her two faculties of eye and ear,  
 The one by which a creature, whom his sins  
 Have rendered prone, can upward look to heaven ;  
 The other that empowers him to perceive  
 The voice of Deity, on height and plain,

<sup>1</sup> *Excursion*, v. ll. 986-993.

Whispering those truths in stillness, which the WORD,  
To the four quarters of the winds, proclaims."

In the Essay on Epitaphs published in the "Friend" in 1810 the same doctrine is expressed more distinctly.

<sup>1</sup> "This is not the place to enter into the recesses of these investigations; but the subject requires me here to make a plain avowal, that, for my own part, it is to me inconceivable, that the sympathies of love towards each other, which grow with our growth, could ever attain any new strength, or even preserve the old, after we had received from the outward senses the impression of death, and were in the habit of having that impression daily renewed and its accompanying feeling brought home to ourselves, and to those we love; if the same were not counteracted by those communications with our internal Being, which are anterior to all these experiences, and with which revelation coincides, *and has through that coincidence alone (for otherwise it could not possess it) a power to affect us.*"

The italics are my own.

The ground of the defence of the institutions of the Church is that truths of particular importance should be fixed in forms.

<sup>2</sup> ". . . The care prospective of our wise  
Forefathers, who, to guard against the shocks,  
The fluctuation and decay of things,  
Embodied and established these high truths  
In solemn institutions."

This justification of institutions by Wordsworth is worth consideration. It may perhaps be true that "solemn

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 928.

<sup>2</sup> *Excursion*, v. ll. 997-1001.

institutions" are at the present time more than ever necessary. We suppose that literature can take their place, that they were the device of an age which had no books; but it is possible that it may be wise to preserve them just because we have so many books, and because there is so much to be learnt. The mass of truths which confronts us is enormous, but in this mass there are a few which are of transcendent importance, and these in some way should be singled out. They ought to be pressed upon us periodically with emphasis, so that we may feel the difference between them and other doctrines which may be disbelieved without peril to our salvation. It may be that institutions are the only protection against the confusion and anarchy which the growing tumult of voices threatens to bring upon us. In the "Essay supplementary to the Preface" of 1815 Wordsworth still further defends religious symbols, and at the same time seems almost to anticipate the charge of uncertainty which has been brought against him.

<sup>1</sup> "The concerns of religion refer to indefinite objects, and are too weighty for the mind to support them without relieving itself by resting a great part of the burthen upon words and symbols. The commerce between Man and his Maker cannot be carried on but by a process where much is represented in little, and the Infinite Being accommodates himself to a finite capacity. In all this may be perceived the affinity between religion and poetry; between religion—making up the deficiencies of reason by faith; and poetry—passionate for the instruction of reason; between religion—whose element is infinitude, and whose ultimate trust is the supreme of things, submitting herself to circumscription, and re-

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 945.

conciled to substitutions; and poetry—ethereal and transcendent, yet incapable to sustain her existence without sensuous incarnation.”

The symbol, we see, is precious to Wordsworth for the very reason that it is not definite. He is not careless nor loose in his thinking, but the object, as he says, is indefinite, and any attempt to give it that sharpness of outline which is necessary to some people does but falsify it. He possesses the rare faculty of arresting the demand of the understanding for a completeness which is illusory, and of being content with what he sees.

If in the remaining books of the “Excursion” the dogmatist seeks for any conclusions which will satisfy him, he will be disappointed. The proud, avaricious, imperfect, unlovely woman of the sixth book who dies with no confession is thus dismissed—

- 1 . . . . . “One vernal evening,  
While she was yet in prime of health and strength,  
I well remember, while I passed her door  
Alone, with loitering step, and upward eye  
Turned towards the planet Jupiter that hung  
Above the centre of the Vale, a voice  
Roused me, her voice; it said, ‘That glorious star  
In its untroubled element will shine  
As now it shines, when we are laid in earth  
And safe from all our sorrows.’ With a sigh  
She spake, yet, I believe, not unsustained  
By faith in glory that shall far transcend  
Aught by these perishable heavens disclosed  
To sight or mind. Nor less than care divine  
Is divine mercy. She, who had rebelled,  
Was into meekness softened and subdued;

<sup>1</sup> *Excursion*, vi. ll. 757-777.

Did, after trials not in vain prolonged,  
 With resignation sink into the grave ;  
 And her uncharitable acts, I trust,  
 And harsh unkindnesses are all forgiven,  
 Tho', in this Vale, remembered with deep awe."

Ellen, the sinner, whose redemption was her love, passes through "the cloud of death"

<sup>1</sup> "Into that pure and unknown world of love  
 Where injury cannot come :"

and even Wilfrid Armathwaite, who broke the marriage vow and was

<sup>2</sup> "Stung by his inward thoughts, and by the smiles  
 Of wife and children stung to agony,"

is "pitied among men" and "absolved by God."

The conviction that no charm, no drug will cure the soul, but that a healthy life is the sole remedy re-appears in the ninth book :

<sup>3</sup> . . . "When we stand upon our native soil,  
 Unelbowed by such objects as oppress  
 Our active powers, those powers themselves become  
 Strong to subvert our noxious qualities :  
 They sweep distemper from the busy day,  
 And make the chalice of the big round year  
 Run o'er with gladness ; whence the Being moves  
 In beauty through the world ; and all who see  
 Bless him, rejoicing in his neighbourhood."

I have reserved as the last of the quotations from the "Excursion" the alterations in the "Story of Margaret" in the first book because they may appear, superficially considered, to be the strongest proofs of

<sup>1</sup> *Excursion*, vi. ll. 1050-1051.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ll. 1096-1097.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ix. ll. 129-137.

Wordsworth's later repentance. This story was partly written between 1795 and 1797. The lines I am now about to cite were not in that portion of the poem which is due to 1795-7, but are probably to be assigned to 1801 and are printed in ordinary type just as they appeared in 1814. The alterations and additions in italics on the right hand were nearly all made in 1845. There were one or two alterations between 1814 and 1845, but none of any importance.

' "The Old Man ceased : he saw  
     that I was moved ;  
 From that low Bench, rising in-  
     stinctively  
 I turn'd aside in weakness, nor  
     had power  
 To thank him for the Tale which  
     he had told.  
 I stood, and leaning o'er the  
     Garden wall,  
 Reviewed that Woman's suffer-  
     ings ; and it seemed  
 To comfort me while with a  
     Brother's love  
 I bless'd her—in the impotence of  
     grief.  
 At length towards the Cottage I  
     returned  
 Fondly,—and traced, with interest  
     more mild,  
 That secret spirit of humanity  
 Which, mid the calm oblivious  
     tendencies  
 Of Nature, mid her plants, and  
     weeds, and flowers,  
 And silent overgrowings, still  
     survived.  
 The Old Man, noting this, re-  
     sumed, and said,  
 ' My Friend ! enough to sorrow  
     you have given,  
 The purposes of wisdom ask no  
     more ;

*Then towards the cottage I  
 returned ; and traced  
 Fondly, though with an interest  
 more mild,*

The purposes of wisdom ask no  
 more :

---

<sup>1</sup> *Excursion*, i. ll. 917-970.

Be wise and chearful; and no  
 longer read  
 The forms of things with an un-  
 worthy eye.  
 She sleeps in the calm earth, and  
 peace is here.  
 I well remember that those very  
 plumes,  
 Those weeds, and the high spear-  
 grass on that wall,  
 By mist and silent rain-drops  
 silver'd o'er,

As once I passed, did to my heart  
 convey  
 So still an image of tranquillity,  
 So calm and still, and looked so  
 beautiful  
 Amid the uneasy thoughts which  
 filled my mind,  
 That what we feel of sorrow and  
 despair  
 From ruin and from change, and  
 all the grief  
 The passing shews of Being leave  
 behind,  
 Appeared an idle dream, that could  
 not live  
 Where meditation was. I turned  
 away  
 And walked along my road in  
 happiness.'

He ceased. Ere long the sun  
 declining shot  
 A slant and mellow radiance,  
 which began  
 To fall upon us, while beneath  
 the trees,  
 We sate on that low Bench: and  
 now we felt,  
 Admonished thus, the sweet hour  
 coming on.  
 A linnet warbled from those lofty  
 elms,  
 A thrush sang loud, and other  
 melodies,  
 At distance heard, peopled the  
 milder air.

*Nor more would she have craved  
 as due to One  
 Who, in her worst distress, had  
 oftentimes felt  
 The unbounded might of prayer;  
 and learned, with soul  
 Fixed on the Cross, that consol-  
 ation springs,  
 From sources deeper far than deep-  
 est pain,  
 For the meek Sufferer. Why then  
 should we read  
 The forms of things with an un-  
 worthy eye?  
 As once I passed, into my heart  
 conveyed*

*That passing shows of Being leave  
 behind,  
 Appeared an idle dream, that  
 could maintain,  
 Nowhere, dominion o'er the en-  
 lightened spirit  
 Whose meditative sympathies  
 repose  
 Upon the breast of Faith. I turned  
 away,*

The Old Man rose, and, with a  
    sprightly mien  
Of hopeful preparation, grasped  
    his Staff:  
Together casting then a farewell  
    look  
Upon those silent walls, we left  
    the Shade;  
And, ere the Stars were visible,  
    had reached  
A Village Inn,—our Evening  
    resting-place.”

These changes, as far as poetry goes, are certainly about the worst of Wordsworth's afterthoughts. Usually his corrections are improvements. But putting poetry aside, and considering the alterations solely from a philosophical and religious point of view, or as an indication of Wordsworth's history, there is no significance in them. Excepting the verbal amendments we hear nothing of them till 1845, and there are scores of lines in the “Excursion” written before 1813 quite as orthodox as those we have just read. Then, again, it must be admitted that the new version is more dramatically consistent than the earlier with the character of the Wanderer. But, more important still, Wordsworth even here is not analytically doctrinal and is content to *point*. Margaret has known the might of prayer, her eyes have rested on the Cross: she has learned

. . . . . “that consolation springs,  
From sources deeper far than deepest pain,”

and the Wanderer is consoled by Faith. There is no exposition of the Atonement, nor are we told definitely what the Faith is, except that it is something awakened by

. . . . . "those very plumes,  
Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,  
By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er."

Neither are we entitled to deduce anything further from that which is before us. Wordsworth's religion was not a thing *constructed* by a professional theologian or metaphysician, but was rather a group of convictions and hopes incapable of reduction to a coherent system. As an illustration of the danger of inference we may take the Wanderer's prayer at the opening of the fourth book.

<sup>1</sup> "But leave me unabated trust in thee—  
And let thy favour, to the end of life,  
Inspire me with ability to seek  
Repose and hope among eternal things—  
Father of heaven and earth ! and I am rich,  
And will possess my portion in content !"

It might be supposed that the "eternal things" are the eternal things of any ordinary preacher ; but, as if on purpose to prevent such a supposition, the Wanderer explains them.

<sup>2</sup> "And what are things eternal ?—powers depart,'  
The grey-haired Wanderer steadfastly replied,  
Answering the question which himself had asked,  
'Possessions vanish, and opinions change,  
And passions hold a fluctuating seat :  
But, by the storms of circumstance unshaken,  
And subject neither to eclipse nor wane,  
Duty exists ; immutably survive,  
For our support, the measures and the forms,  
Which an abstract intelligence supplies ;  
Whose kingdom is, where time and space are not."

<sup>1</sup> *Excursion*, iv. ll. 60-64.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ll. 65-76.

Could anything be more unexpected? The "things eternal" in which he is to find repose are Duty and the measures and forms supplied by abstract intelligence, or, as they are called a little lower down, the "transcendent truths of the pure intellect," everlasting as "the blessed spirits" whom God includes "as the sea her waves."

Coleridge was disappointed with the "Excursion." In a letter to Wordsworth dated 30th May 1815 he gives his reasons:

<sup>1</sup> "Whatever in Lucretius is poetry is not philosophical, whatever is philosophical is not poetry; and in the very pride of confident hope I looked forward to 'The Recluse' as the *first* and *only* true philosophical poem in existence. Of course, I expected the colours, music, imaginative life, and passion of *poetry*; but the matter and arrangement of *philosophy*; not doubting from the advantages of the subject that the totality of a system was not only capable of being harmonized with, but even calculated to aid, the unity (beginning, middle, and end) of a poem. Thus, whatever the length of the work might be, still it was a *determinate* length; of the subjects announced, each would have its own appointed place, and, excluding repetitions, each would relieve and rise in interest above the other. I supposed you first to have meditated the faculties of man in the abstract, in their correspondence with his sphere of action, and, first in the feeling, touch, and taste, then in the eye, and last in the ear,—to have laid a solid and immovable foundation for the edifice by removing the sandy sophisms of Locke, and the mechanic dogmatists, and demonstrating that the senses were living growths and developments of the mind and spirit, in a much juster as well as higher sense, than the mind can be said to be formed by the senses. Next, I understood that you would take the human race in the concrete,

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, vol. ii. p. 648.

have exploded the absurd notion of Pope's 'Essay on Man,' Darwin, and all the countless believers even (strange to say) among Christians of man's having progressed from an ourang-outang state—so contrary to all history, to all religion, nay to all possibility—to have affirmed a Fall in some sense, as a fact, the possibility of which cannot be understood from the nature of the will, but the reality of which is attested by experience and conscience. Fallen men contemplated in the different ages of the world, and in the different states—savage, barbarous, civilized, the lonely cot, or borderer's wigwam, the village, the manufacturing town, seaport, city, universities, and, not disguising the sore evils under which the whole creation groans, to point out, however, a manifest scheme of redemption, of reconciliation with this enmity with Nature—what are the obstacles, the *Antichrist* that must be and already is—and to conclude by a grand didactic swell on the necessary identity of a true philosophy with true religion, agreeing in the results and differing only as the analytic and synthetic process, as discursive from intuitive, the former chiefly useful as perfecting the latter; in short, the necessity of a general revolution in the modes of developing and disciplining the human mind by the substitution of life and intelligence (considered in its different powers from the plant up to that state in which the difference of degree becomes a new kind (man, self-consciousness), but yet not by essential opposition), for the philosophy of mechanism, which, in everything that is most worthy of the human intellect, strikes *Death*, and cheats itself by mistaking clear images for distinct conceptions, and which idly demands conceptions where intuitions alone are possible or adequate to the majesty of the Truth. In short, facts elevated into theory—theory into laws—and laws into living and intelligent powers—true idealism necessarily perfecting itself in realism, and realism refining itself into idealism."

Granting that Coleridge could have written a poem on this plan, it is a matter for thankfulness that Wordsworth did not adopt it and that we have the "Excursion" as it stands, notwithstanding its inconclusiveness. Wordsworth never answered Coleridge's criticism, or, if he did, no trace of the answer is extant.

Let us look at a few other expressions of Wordsworth's mind during the time the "Excursion" was being written. The "Beggars" was composed in 1802 and published in 1807. It is the story of a couple of gipsy urchins who tell the poet a lie in order to secure an alms.

<sup>1</sup> "They dart across my path—but lo,  
Each ready with a plaintive whine!  
Said I, 'not half an hour ago  
Your Mother has had alms of mine.'  
'That cannot be,' one answered—'she is dead : '—  
I looked reproof—they saw—but neither hung his head.

'She has been dead, Sir, many a day.'—  
'Hush, boys ! you're telling me a lie ;  
It was your Mother, as I say !'  
And, in the twinkling of an eye,  
'Come ! come !' cried one, and without more ado  
Off to some other play the joyous Vagrants flew !"

There is not a syllable of denunciation, and Wordsworth calmly told <sup>2</sup>Crabb Robinson that he purposely intended "to exhibit the power of physical beauty and health and vigour in childhood, even in a state of moral depravity." Not even a lie damns the liar for him ; he detaches from the lie the "physical beauty and health and vigour" as something to be loved. "At the Grave of Burns" is dated by Wordsworth 1803, but the exact date when it

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary*, vol. i. p. 266.

was completed is uncertain. It was not published till 1842, and received Wordsworth's sanction when he was 72. What is the final thought by that grave ?

<sup>1</sup> "For *he* is safe, a quiet bed  
Hath early found among the dead,  
Harboured where none can be misled,  
Wronged, or distressed ;  
And surely here it may be said  
That such are blest.

"And oh for Thee, by pitying grace  
Checked oft-times in a devious race,  
May He, who halloweth the place  
Where Man is laid,  
Receive thy Spirit in the embrace  
For which it prayed !

"Sighing I turned away ; but ere  
Night fell I heard, or seemed to hear,  
Music that sorrow comes not near,  
A ritual hymn,  
Chanted in love that casts out fear  
By Seraphim."

He not only refrains from any theological condemnation of Burns, but he does not consider it any part of his duty to criticise him as criticism is generally understood, that is to say, to assume the attitude of an allegorical Justice and put vices in one scale and virtues in the other. To estimate a man by the balance in this way looks simple enough ; but it presupposes, what is often impossible, that we can separate vices from virtues. The root of the vice may be the root also of the virtue. Wordsworth, although a water-drinker, could not award anything but

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 284.

praise even to Tam O'Shanter.<sup>1</sup> One evening Coleridge and Wordsworth were with Crabb Robinson at Morgan's. Coleridge was "very metaphysical" and "adhered to Kant," but Wordsworth "praised Burns for his introduction to" Tam O'Shanter. Burns had given an "apology for drunkenness, by bringing together all the circumstances which can serve to render excusable that which is in itself disgusting ; thus interesting our feelings, and making us tolerant of what would otherwise be not endurable." The next day but one Robinson walked to Hampstead, and found Wordsworth defending earnestly the Church Establishment.<sup>2</sup> "He even said he would shed his blood for it. Nor was he disconcerted by a laugh raised against him on account of his having before confessed that he knew not when he had been in a church in his own country. 'All our ministers are so vile,' said he. The mischief of allowing the clergy to depend on the caprice of the multitude he thought more than outweighed all the evils of an establishment."

The "Ode to Duty" belongs to 1805. In this noble poem Duty is, it is true, "stern Daughter of the Voice of God"; but if we hastily assume that Wordsworth "adhered to Kant" we shall be much mistaken. He says of his goddess :

3 . . . . "Thou dost wear  
The Godhead's most benignant grace ;  
Nor know we anything so fair  
As is the smile upon thy face :  
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds  
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;  
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong ;  
And the most ancient heavens, through Thee,  
are fresh and strong."

<sup>1</sup> *Diary*, i. p. 388.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 389.    <sup>3</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 492.

<sup>1</sup> Duty is, in fact, nothing special, nothing antagonistic to Nature. The laws which control the planets in their orbits, and maintain the stability of the Universe, become Duty when they reveal themselves in man. Those who do not formally acknowledge the obligations of Duty may be none the less what they ought to be. Joy and youth may be authentic legislators.

“There are who ask not if thine eye  
Be on them ; who, in love and truth,  
Where no misgiving is, rely  
Upon the genial sense of youth :  
Glad Hearts ! without reproach or blot ;  
Who do thy work, and know it not :  
Oh ! if through confidence misplaced  
They fail, thy saving arms, dread Power ! around  
                  them cast.

“Serene will be our days and bright,  
And happy will our nature be,  
When love is an unerring light,  
And joy its own security.”

In September 1806, on a stormy day, Wordsworth heard that Fox was dying. He went for a walk in the evening, “sad . . . even to pain deprest.” The “Comforter,” the Holy Ghost, nothing less, found him “upon this lonely road” and consoled him. This is what the Holy Ghost said to him :

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey, in the *Edinburgh Review*, said that the last two lines of this quotation were “utterly without meaning,” forgetting his Bible, which Wordsworth probably remembered. He is not more unmeaning than the author of the book of Proverbs, who makes the Wisdom which “walks in the way of *righteousness*” declare that “when He established the Heavens I was there . . . then I was by Him, as a master workman, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.”

<sup>1</sup> "A Power is passing from the earth  
To breathless Nature's dark abyss;  
But when the great and good depart  
What is it more than this—

"That Man, who is from God sent forth,  
Doth yet again to God return?—  
Such ebb and flow must ever be,  
Then wherefore should we mourn?"

A singular inspiration, especially if we consider that Fox was not altogether exemplary.

The "Ecclesiastical Sketches" are to the ordinary reader the most uninteresting of all Wordsworth's poems, and they are ecclesiastical in substance as well as in name. They were mostly written in 1821. In 1820 Wordsworth visited Sir G. Beaumont, who was then about to build a church on his estate, and, the conversation turning on church matters, the poet conceived the design of recording the history of "the Church of England both previous and subsequent to the Reformation." But there is something more in the "Sketches" than a history. They fall into two divisions, one being an expression of the various *moments* in the history, and the other an interpretation of the Church Services. They are no doubt a poetic mistake; but they can be explained—and the same explanation will serve for more of Wordsworth's poetry—by his theory that it was possible by proper treatment to discharge their prosaism from prosaic subjects. The theory is not altogether true, but the part that is true is much more important than the part which is false, because we are particularly liable to overlook the commonplace for want of some slight turn to show us what its

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 581.

real form and colour are. Many subjects, nevertheless, cannot be made poetical, and amongst them are most of the texts for the "Sketches." I am not concerned, however, with the "Sketches" as works of art, but as theology. I select the two which more than any of the others are expressive of conformity to the established religion.

# <sup>1</sup> BAPTISM.

"Dear be the Church that, watching o'er the needs  
Of Infancy, provides a timely shower  
Whose virtue changes to a christian Flower  
A Growth from sinful Nature's bed of weeds !—  
Fitliest beneath the sacred roof proceeds  
The ministration ; while parental Love  
Looks on, and Grace descendeth from above  
As the high service pledges now, now pleads.  
There, should vain thoughts outspread their wings and fly  
To meet the coming hours of festal mirth,  
The tombs—which hear and answer that brief cry,  
The Infant's notice of his second birth—  
Recall the wandering Soul to sympathy  
With what man hopes from Heaven, yet fears from  
Earth."

# <sup>2</sup> THANKSGIVING AFTER CHILDBIRTH.

"Woman ! the Power who left His throne on high,  
And deigned to wear the robe of flesh we wear,  
The Power that thro' the straits of Infancy  
Did pass dependent on maternal care,  
His own humanity with Thee will share,  
Pleased with the thanks that in His People's eye  
Thou offerest up for safe Delivery  
From Childbirth's perilous throes. And should the Heir  
Of thy fond hopes hereafter walk inclined  
To courses fit to make a mother rue

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 445.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 447.

That ever he was born, a glance of mind  
Cast upon this observance may renew  
A better will ; and, in the imagined view  
Of thee thus kneeling, safety he may find."

The first of these sonnets was first published in 1827, and the second in 1845. There is nothing stronger than these in the whole series, and they make it clear that Wordsworth, when they were written, held in some fashion to the Incarnation, the Atonement, and Baptismal Regeneration. Directly, however, we attempt to go beyond this bare assertion, we begin to doubt. What is the meaning of the following sonnet, and why is it here among the "Sketches" as No. 34 ?

<sup>1</sup> MUTABILITY.

"From low to high doth dissolution climb,  
And sink from high to low, along a scale  
Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail ;  
A musical but melancholy chime,  
Which they can hear who meddle not with crime,  
Nor avarice, nor over-anxious care.  
Truth fails not ; but her outward forms that bear  
The longest date do melt like frosty rime,  
That in the morning whitened hill and plain  
And is no more ; drop like the tower sublime  
Of yesterday, which royally did wear  
His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain  
Some casual shout that broke the silent air,  
Or the unimaginable touch of Time."

Is mutability, then, so characteristic of things ecclesiastical that when the thoughts are turned to them it naturally presents itself ?

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 449.

The dogmatic references, also, in the "Sketches" are few. There is not a single sonnet on a creed, and the Athanasian Creed is not once mentioned. The sonnets include Catholicism as well as Protestantism, and indeed the best are those which are Catholic. The "Point at Issue" between Catholicism and Protestantism is thus put :

- <sup>1</sup> " For what contend the wise ?—for nothing less  
 Than that the Soul, freed from the bonds of Sense,  
 And to her God restored by evidence  
 Of things not seen, drawn forth from their recess,  
 Root there, and not in forms, her holiness" ;—

This would certainly not be accepted as the "point at issue" by any party in the Protestant Church, although it is very like Wordsworth to make it the one point for which wise men would contend. At times he is at least half-Catholic. Take, for example, the following sonnet from "Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820" :

<sup>2</sup> COMPOSED IN ONE OF THE CATHOLIC CANTONS.

" Doomed as we are our native dust  
 To wet with many a bitter shower,  
 It ill befits us to disdain  
 The altar, to deride the fane,  
 Where simple Sufferers bend, in trust  
 To win a happier hour.

" I love, where spreads the village lawn,  
 Upon some knee-worn cell to gaze :  
 Hail to the firm unmoving cross,  
 Aloft, where pines their branches toss !  
 And to the chapel far withdrawn,  
 That lurks by lonely ways !

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 436.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 337.

“Where’er we roam—along the brink  
 Of Rhine—or by the sweeping Po,  
 Through Alpine vale, or champaign wide,  
 Whate’er we look on, at our side  
 Be Charity !—to bid us think,  
 And feel, if we would know.”

So also in the “Stanzas suggested in a Steamboat off St. Bees’ Head” :

<sup>1</sup> “Thanks to the austere and simple Devotees,  
 Who, to that service bound by venial fees,  
 Keep watch before the altars of St. Bees.

“Are not, in sooth, their Requiem’s sacred ties  
 Woven out of passion’s sharpest agonies,  
 Subdued, composed, and formalized by art,  
 To fix a wiser sorrow in the heart ?  
 The prayer for them whose hour is past away  
 Says to the Living, profit while ye may !  
 A little part, and that the worst, he sees  
 Who thinks that priestly cunning holds the keys  
 That best unlock the secrets of St. Bees.”

One more remark upon the “Ecclesiastical Sketches.” They are dull, but their dullness is significant, because, although Wordsworth was so far misled as to suppose that such material as the Communion Service and Dr. Sacheverell could be transmuted into poems, he does not attempt to get up any fervour over it. He does not whip up his feelings, and there is less emotion in the “Sketches” than in his addresses to kittens and butterflies. He felt less emotion and was too honest to manufacture it.

Let us look at some other poems written about the time when the “Sketches” were composed, or after them. We do not know precisely the date of the

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 465.

following sonnet, but Wordsworth printed it for the first time in the "Waggoner" volume of 1819, and in the Fenwick note of many years after says: "Not once only, but a hundred times, have the feelings of this sonnet been awakened by the same objects seen from the same place."

<sup>1</sup> "I watch, and long have watched, with calm regret  
Yon slowly-sinking star—immortal Sire  
(So might he seem) of all the glittering quire!  
Blue ether still surrounds him—yet—and yet;  
But now the horizon's rocky parapet  
Is reached, where, forfeiting his bright attire,  
He burns—transmuted to a dusky fire—  
Then pays submissively the appointed debt  
To the flying moments, and is seen no more.  
Angels and gods! We struggle with our fate,  
While health, power, glory, from their height decline,  
Depressed; and then extinguished: and our state,  
In this, how different, lost Star, from thine,  
That no to-morrow shall our beams restore!"

Wordsworth's hope, "a hundred times" depressed as he saw the stars set behind Loughrigg Fell, was certainly not the unwavering so-called conviction of an ordinary member of a sect. In the second ode to Lycoris, due to 1817, he describes how he is

<sup>2</sup> . . . . "More and more  
Drawn towards the centre whence those sighs creep forth  
To awe the lightness of humanity."

"Devotional Incitements" belongs to as late a date as 1832. After an enthusiastic description of "the town's cathedral quire," the poem concludes thus:

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 498.

<sup>1</sup> "Alas ! the sanctities combined  
By art to unsensualise the mind  
Decay and languish ; or, as creeds  
And humours change, are spurned like weeds :  
The priests are from their altars thrust ;  
Temples are levelled with the dust ;  
And solemn rites and awful forms  
Founder amid fanatic storms.  
Yet evermore, through years renewed  
In undisturbed vicissitude  
Of seasons balancing their flight  
On the swift wings of day and night,  
Kind Nature keeps a heavenly door  
Wide open for the scattered Poor.  
Where flower-breathed incense to the skies  
Is wafted in mute harmonies ;  
And ground fresh-cloven by the plough  
Is fragrant with a humbler vow ;  
Where birds and brooks from leafy dells  
Chime forth unwearied canticles,  
And vapours magnify and spread  
The glory of the sun's bright head—  
Still constant in her worship, still  
Conforming to the eternal Will,  
Whether men sow or reap the fields,  
Divine monition Nature yields,  
That not by bread alone we live,  
Or what a hand of flesh can give ;  
That every day should leave some part  
Free for a sabbath of the heart :  
So shall the seventh be truly blest,  
From morn to eve, with hallowed rest."

If Wordsworth was thinking exclusively—an improbability which is almost an impossibility—of the unreal sanctities of religions which were not his own and

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 228.

believed that his own religion was permanent, why was it not used as the contrast? Why did he prefer the divine monition of Nature?

During his Italian tour in 1837 he heard a cuckoo at Laverna, which moved him to think

<sup>1</sup> "On the great Prophet, styled *the Voice of One*  
*Crying amid the wilderness,*" . . . .

and he would have

. . . . "given  
Now that their snows must melt, their herbs and flowers  
Revive, their obstinate winter pass away,  
That awful name to Thee, thee, simple Cuckoo,  
Wandering in solitude, and evermore  
Foretelling and proclaiming, ere thou leave  
This thy last haunt beneath Italian skies  
To carry thy glad tidings over heights  
Still loftier, and to climes more near the Pole."

This little poem may not be of much value, but it shows how unaffected Wordsworth is by ordinary associations, and how he makes his own. The simple cuckoo becomes the great Christian prophet, and spring is the advent of our Lord. The common distinction between sacred and profane is nothing to him.

Wordsworth was in the habit of revising his poems continuously. We cannot infer that because he did not alter a passage he entirely approved it or did not wish that he had expressed himself differently; but if he had really apostatised, he would not have consented to republish much that appears in the edition of 1849-50. He would not have sanctioned what he felt to be dangerous error. It would be difficult, however, to select more than

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 361.

a dozen lines which have been excised or modified because they were heretical politically or theologically. His revision in the main was poetical. The bold passages in the "Descriptive Sketches" are left undisturbed, and the preface to the "Excursion" retains in 1849-50 the verses which frightened some of Wordsworth's friends in 1814.

- <sup>1</sup> "For I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink  
 Deep—and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds  
 To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.  
 All strength—all terror, single or in bands,  
 That ever was put forth in personal form—  
 Jehovah—with his thunder, and the choir  
 Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones—  
 I pass them unalarmed."

This may serve as a specimen of scores of other passages of the same type reproduced without change or apologetic comment.

The "Waggoner" written in 1805 and published in 1819, was much revised subsequently; but there is not one alteration which tends to disturb our sympathy with Benjamin. Burns himself could not have loved Benjamin better than Wordsworth loved him long after the date of the "Ecclesiastical Sketches." Not a correction is made from 1805 downwards in the lines describing the confidence of the horses in their master.

- <sup>2</sup> "For this they know (and let it hide,  
 In part, the offences of their guide)  
 That Benjamin, with clouded brains,  
 Is worth the best with all their pains;  
 And, if they had a prayer to make,  
 The prayer would be that they may take

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 755.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 178.

With him whatever comes in course,  
The better fortune or the worse ;  
That no one else may have business near them,  
And, drunk or sober, he may steer them."

In a note added in 1836 Wordsworth tells us, evidently with delight, that he and Coleridge met Benjamin after his dismissal, and that in reply to an expression of regret that the waggon had been taken off the road, he said that "they could not do without me ; and as to the man who was put in my place, no good could come out of him ; he was a man of no *ideas*." The "Waggoner" was dedicated to Lamb, who, as may be imagined, saw in a moment its meaning or one of its meanings. It was "no common favourite" with him because of its "spirit of beautiful tolerance." It may not be out of place to observe that Wordsworth never wavered in his reverential affection for Lamb. Lamb differed from him on many points accounted "fundamental" by theologians and moralists, but Wordsworth's testimony in 1835 was that

<sup>1</sup> . . . . "at the centre of his being, lodged  
A soul by resignation sanctified."

It does not seem to have struck Wordsworth's biographers that he owed much to Lamb ; but if we remember that the friendship began in 1797, and that it was very intimate, we cannot help believing that it greatly influenced Wordsworth's poetry. I like to think that to Lamb something is due of the "beautiful tolerance" which distinguishes the "Waggoner," "Beggars," and the "Two Thieves."

If it be said that I have not done much to defend

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Wordsworth*, p. 584.

Wordsworth, I can but reply that the attack is weak. No stronger evidence against him can be obtained from his poems, letters, or life than that which I have produced. The utmost which can fairly be admitted after patient examination is that, superficially, in religious matters he was *always* inconsistent; but it is untrue that he ever fell away from the faith of his earlier years or that he ever added anything destructive of it. The apparent contradictions in his creed were not of a kind which involved treason. Ahaz, we know, instructed Urijah the priest to built an altar after the Damascus model and to offer thereon the great sacrifices and the king's sacrifice, but to retain the altar of Jehovah in order that private inquiry might be made of Him thereon. That was an inconsistency which was fatal. Wordsworth worshipped the true God alone, from the days of the "Lyrical Ballads" to his death, and set up no shrine to Baal. His religion was like that of the "Wanderer,"

"Who to the model of his own pure heart  
Shaped his belief, as grace divine inspired,  
And human reason dictated with awe;"<sup>1</sup>

but he conformed—in his own way—to the rites of the Church of England. That is a fact, but we must take it simply as it stands. If it be said that he *could* not have conformed if he had remained what he was when he wrote the "Prelude," I deny the conclusion absolutely.

<sup>1</sup> "Theologians may puzzle their heads about dogmas as they will, the religion of gratitude cannot mislead us. Of that we are sure; and gratitude is the handmaid to hope, and hope the harbinger of faith. I look abroad upon Nature, I think of the best part of our Species, I lean upon my Friends, and I meditate upon the Scriptures, especially the Gospel of St. John, and my creed rises up of itself, with the ease of an exhalation, yet a fabric of adamant." Letter from W. W. to Sir G. Beaumont. 28 May 1825. *Life*, iii. 115.

Genuine convictions much more discordant than any which he held are to be found side by side in honest men. Spinoza's philosophy is strict, but even Spinoza declared *revelationem maxime necessariam fuisse*, advised the people of the house in which he lodged not to miss any of their clergyman's sermons, and told his landlady that her religion was a good one and that she was not to look for another.

The explanation of the vulgar mistake with regard to Wordsworth I believe mainly to be that more than most men he has suffered from cursory inspection. A large part of what he wrote is not externally attractive, and is little read. Nevertheless, he is a man of such mark that all cultivated men and women feel that they must have something to say about him, and so they take up "Lucy Gray" and "1815" and pass on, summing him up in a phrase, "inspired poet, dullest of renegades." The antithesis does not exist, and could not have existed; but it saves them much trouble, not only in criticism and conversation, but in their own thinking. It is also seductive, because it is so much more *brilliant* to shut up a man like Wordsworth in a formula than to confess we can but put down a point here and there which cannot be connected by any circumscribing outline.

Another reason why the renegade half of the antithesis is popular is that people are disappointed that Wordsworth did not develop after the ordinary fashion. If he had become a poet of revolt and despair, he would have been more acceptable to most of those persons who make poems, review them, or read them; but the poetry of revolt and despair has already become rather easy and certainly superfluous. We are beginning to see that the merest fragment added to the stock of beliefs which

enable us to live in peace and hope is of more value than profitless rebellion. It is not my object, however, to attempt any estimate of Wordsworth's services. My sole aim is to show that he was no apostate, and that to the last he was *himself*.







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